**Do we compete too much?**

**[Atle Hetland](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/atle-hetland)**

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If we are interested in sports, we have a great summer this year. Well, maybe there could have been more cricket on TV, of course, but we have been able to see plenty of football as the European Football Championship has gone on, with many great games, including national teams from Spain, Denmark, England, Italy, Czech Republic, and so on. In the finals, England and Italy were equally good and should have shared the trophy, not having a strange penalty kick system ending it all. England got to prove that they are back in the lead in the world, even after they left the EU a year and a half ago. Last time England won was in 1966, before they joined the EU in 1973. Sadly, racist misbehaviour happened after this year’s finals and that must never happen again, not in sports nor in other situations. The next treat for sports enthusiasts is the Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan, opening just after Eid- ul-Azha on July 23 until August 8. Ordinary spectators will not be allowed, but we will have a chance to watch it all on TV.

[Africa to receive first US-donated COVID-19 vaccines](https://nation.com.pk/17-Jul-2021/africa-to-receive-first-us-donated-covid-19-vaccines)

Sports and games are important at all times, especially so in the serious times we live in, with Covid-19, joblessness, migration, growing poverty, climate change and an uncertain future. Sports and games give us a chance to think about lighter things, although serious enough, because in sports, too, it is important to win and stand on the victory podium with the national flag hoisted. It is about competing, and too much of that, and winning.

In team sports, like football and cricket, there is much less minute precision than in individual sports, such as running and swimming. In such sports, fractions of seconds decide who wins and who loses. For example, a few weeks ago, the Norwegian sportsman Karsten Warholm clocked in at 46.70 seconds and smashed Kevin Young’s long standing record at 46.78 in 400 meter hurdles. If you ask me, I can’t see any difference. If I can’t see the difference with the naked eye, only read the difference on a Swiss stop watch then the performers are equally good. In the old days, we talked about a horse head’s difference, or perhaps it was half a horse head. That made sense, because people could see it, and they could use an additional target photo, too, so no one, not gamblers either, could question the prize money.

[UK's COVID-19 infections surpass 50,000](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/uk-s-covid-19-infections-surpass-50-000)

In sports and other fields, we have gone too far in defining difference, winners and losers. In tennis, for example, I’d say that the top dozen of players are basically equally good; but illogical as we human beings can be, we make big games with big money, and let the little group compete. We have reached a stage when it is technology and sports money which has lead us and decide how we should think.

I am saddened about the high physical, psychological and social pressure we place on sportsmen and women today, both in individual and team sports. We place far too high demands of the gladiators of our time, and they place immense pressure on themselves not only to excel, but also for fame, money and more. Many overextend what is good for their body, short and long term health and wellbeing. We witness that young sportsmen and women collapse or get permanent illnesses, physically, mentally and socially. And then, if a football player at the age of 20 flies his private jet and drives a Porsche sports car, something has gone totally out of hand. Earlier, movie stars and pop artists were similar victims to fame and money, and they too had their normal lives destroyed for good.

[German military on alert after severe floods](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/german-military-on-alert-after-severe-floods)

We can however change it all if we want to. We can find new ways of holding sports competitions and games, better and more fun than today. Most important and most difficult is to ban big money in sports, knowing that there are corrupt sharks everywhere in sports, with sponsors and advertisers. Yet, I don’t want to take away the fun we have watching elite sports, following sportsmen and women’s careers, holding never ending discussions, and so on. I want us to find simpler and more natural ways of organising competitions, also so that it is more fun for the performers. Again, sports should first and foremost be to entertain people, so that we all can get away from everyday struggles and relax.

In many ways, sports and games are like mirrors of the world we live in. Making money and having success seem to be essential, and that means to compete from kindergarten to university, from our first to the last job and throughout life. Let me draw attention to how obsessed we have become with testing and ranking children in most, if not all, countries. In Norway, grades are not to be used until upper primary school. Still, more focus must be given to learning to cooperate, be peaceful and helpful, show care and empathy for one another, and so on; including in physical education and sports.

[Four tourists injured in Babusar Top road mishap](https://nation.com.pk/16-Jul-2021/four-tourists-injured-in-babusar-top-road-mishap)

Last year, Sweden ran into trouble after implementing the so-called PISA Tests under OECD. The programme is called Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), ranking countries’ education systems based on tests of 15-year olds in languages, maths and science subjects. Sweden exempted a large proportion of immigrant students from taking the tests, thus getting higher average scores than would otherwise have been the case. The Swedish politicians and administrators spent a lot of time defending and explaining; instead, they should have talked about substance and how to make the education system better and less competitive. After all, education is not about taking tests and scoring high according to some kinds of standards.

In sports, it should be about much more than measuring in fractions of seconds and millimetres who is best, who jumps highest and who runs fastest. It is not really about earning big money, getting sponsors and holding huge games. In last Sunday’s football match at Wembley in London, the English and the Italian teams were equally good, and they should have shared the gold medal. We should all have celebrated together, irrespective of creed, colour, nationality, and more. We must learn to compete less, and when we do, we must do it friendlier ways. We should celebrate even if we aren’t the best, and most of the time, we are not.